Reading Toolkit: Grade 8 Objective 3.A.3.f

Standard 3.0 Comprehension of Literary Text

Topic A. Comprehension of Literary Text

Indicator 3. Analyze and evaluate elements of narrative texts to facilitate understanding and interpretation

Objective f. Analyze the actions of characters that serve to advance the plot

Assessment Limits:

Connections between the actions of the characters and the outcome of the plot

Connections between the actions of the characters and the outcome of the plot

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Lesson Seeds
Reading Grade 8 Objective 3.A.3.f

Activities

The teacher should place the students in small groups to read a narrative text. Each group should be assigned a major character and as reading progresses students should record the actions of the assigned character. When reading is complete, the group of students should decide upon the single most important action of their assigned character based upon its effect on the plot of the story. Each group should present their findings to the class and justify their choice with text support.

Working with half the class while the remaining class members work independently on a related assignment, the teacher will organize a round table discussion that addresses character action and effect on plot. The teacher should begin by identifying the character and a single action. Have students use text support to discuss why they believe the character chose that action. Next students should discuss how that action affected the conclusion of the plot. Then students should provide alternate actions for the character that would fit the frame of the story. Finally students should discuss how an alternate action would change the conclusion of the story. Reverse the activities of the class and discuss that same character or another character and a single action.

After reading a narrative text, randomly distribute a slip of paper on which is written a character's name or a character's action to each student. Allow students time to walk about the room aligning themselves into groups which would feature a single character and his/her actions. Have each group order the character's actions from least to most important based upon that action's effect on the outcome of the plot. Using text support to justify decisions, each group should present its findings to the class.

After a first reading of a narrative text, students will be assigned a character from that text. First students should reread the text and record sequentially on a chart the most important actions of that character. After completing this first task, students should analyze each action to determine what type of effect it had on the outcome of the story. Students should share their decisions with a partner, small group, or whole class.

Character Name	Actions	Effect of Actions on Plot
Description		

Clarification

Reading Grade 8 Indicator 3.A.3

To show proficiency of the skills stated in this indicator, a reader will demonstrate an understanding of the elements of narrative texts which are the components through which a story is told. Identification of each component and its relationship to all other components in a story assists a reader in comprehension of an entire text. As a text requires more complex thought processes, a reader advances from the identification, recognition, and recall of literal elements to the inference, analysis, and evaluation of more abstract elements. Thinking about all the elements in a story and determining how they fit together allow the reader to understand and evaluate an entire text and its complexity.

In order to comprehend narrative text, a reader must identify and distinguish among types of narrative texts. Narrative text tells a story to make a point, to express a personal opinion, or to provide a reader an enjoyable experience. By recognizing the characteristics of a variety of literary texts which represent diverse perspectives, a reader is better able to construct meaning from a text.

Fiction
prose writing that tells an imaginary story
Nonfiction
prose writing that tells about real people, places, and events
Realistic Fiction
prose writing set in the modern world
Science Fiction
prose writing that explores unexpected possibilities of the past or future by using scientific theories or data and imagination
Historical Fiction
contemporary fiction set in the past, may reference actual people or events
Tall Tales
humorously exaggerated stories about impossible events in which the main characters have extraordinary abilities
Folktales
stories passed by word of mouth from generation to generation
Folklore
traditions, customs, and stories passed down within a culture
Myth
a traditional story, usually by an unknown author, that answers a basic question about the world
Legend
a story handed down from the past about a specific person who usually demonstrates heroic accomplishments
Fables
brief tales that teach lessons about human nature
Fairy Tales
stories about imaginary beings possessing magical powers
Fantasy
literature that contains fantastic or unreal elements
Biography
story of a person's life written by someone else
Autobiography
nonfiction; a person tells about his or her own life

Personal Narrative
personal story; a shorter form of autobiographical writing
Memoir
type of autobiography, usually about a significant experience in the author's life
Journals
a personal record of experiences or reflections
Short Story
a brief work of fiction, usually readable in one session
Essay
a short, cohesive work of nonfiction dealing with a single subject and presenting the writer's viewpoint
Play
literature intended to be performed by actors in front of an audience; includes script with dialogue, a cast of characters, and stage directions
Poetry
stories, ideas, and feelings expressed in compact, imaginative, often musical language
Lyric Poetry
poetry that presents the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker
Narrative Poetry
poetry that tells a story and includes narrative elements

To identify, explain and analyze the conflict of a narrative and determine its role in advancing the plot, a reader must know the structure of a narrative passage.

- In the beginning or exposition of a narrative, information is given about the characters, their location, and the situation in which they find themselves. This situation creates a story problem or conflict.
- A conflict can be created by single or multiple sources, either external (caused by outside forces) or internal (created within the character). Typical types of conflict include person versus person (problem between and among characters), person versus society (problem with the laws/beliefs of a group), person versus nature (problem with natural forces), person versus self (problem within a character regarding decision-making), and person versus fate (problem which seems out of a character's control). In complex texts, there may be multiple conflicts.

  A character experiencing one of these conflicts may act on or speak about the conflict to other characters and be motivated to action by the conflict. In some narratives, a conflict may help clarify character traits for the reader. In other stories, a conflict can also advance the story events, pushing the characters to a critical point of a story.

  A critical reader can identify and determine conflicts, sometimes isolating a common cause for different conflicts.

- In the rising action, the chronology of events develops and the conflict deepens. At the climax of the narrative, the deepening conflict reaches a critical point and can alter the subsequent events.
- As the conflict resolves, the narrative moves toward completion in the falling action.
- Finally, in the resolution the narrative comes to a close. A critical reader should be able to analyze the resolution of the conflict and trace the plot development to determine how each stage of that development advanced the plot.
- As the level of a text becomes more difficult and the main plot develops, a subplot of lesser importance may be present. The subplot may have all the elements that a main plot does and will tell a story that relates to character development, theme development,

or any other story element. The subplot may have an effect on the outcome of the main plot or may simply serve as additional, perhaps interesting, element of the story.

To identify, describe, and analyze details that provide information about setting, mood created by setting, and the role the setting plays in the text, a reader must first know what information to look for in a text. Setting is where and when a story takes place. Clues to setting include any of the following: time, day or dates, month, year, season, historical references, geographical names, landscape details, and weather elements. As the complexity of a text increases, a reader should take note not only of stated setting details but also look at more subtle details.

Setting can relay information about characters to a reader. A character's reaction to an environment, whether familiar or unfamiliar, gives clues to what a character is feeling or how a character will act in certain circumstances. Changes in setting may signal changes in mood and development of a character.

Mood is the feeling a text creates within a reader. Setting can help create mood. For example, a setting in an abandoned house creates an eerie mood. Details of that setting help establish that uncomfortable mood in a reader. An author also creates mood through dialogue and word choice.

A critical reader will be attentive to the details of setting, mood, and character and their integration within a narrative.

Not all narrative texts have theme, but in those that do, there is often more than a single theme. Theme is the author's message to the reader or the underlying idea of a text. Theme is often relayed to a reader through characters—what they say, what they do, or what others say about them-as well as by other narrative elements.

To identify and analyze characterization, a reader must identify a character as a person, animal, or imaginary being in a narrative. Major characters are most involved in the conflict of a narrative and are central to much of the story action. Minor characters are less important and become known to a reader through their interaction with major characters.

Characters may reveal their attitudes and innermost thoughts through their speech and their behavior. For more complicated texts, a reader is privileged to know directly the interior thought processes of a character.This enables a reader to draw conclusions about why a character might behave the way he/she does and to consider reasons for the type of interactions that character has with other major or minor characters. Then these interactions allow other characters to comment about the behavior or speech of that character. One character's comments about another character form a direct link to understanding their behavior.

Character speech, action, thought, motivation, and reaction are interdependent and work together to create well-rounded characters. These elements make a character "real" and lend believability to the narrative. When characters are made "real," they, like real people, change and grow. They are called dynamic characters because of their development. Their opposite, static characters, change not at all or only marginally. The strong, dynamic character shifts or is shifted by the plot, each exerting an equally forceful influence on each other. Character and plot then become linked in a narrative.

To identify, explain, and analyze relationships between and among characters, settings, and events, a reader must discover how each element is linked. Connections between and among characters are established by elements of characterization. Connections between

and among situations are established by key events and how these events fit together. A critical reader can determine an organizational pattern, such as cause and effect, between or among situations and then draw conclusions about characters and their speech and behaviors within the context of the situation.

For more complicated texts, a critical reader can isolate characters and determine major from minor characters, the degree to which each is developed, and how they affect each other and the story events. A critical reader can isolate each story event to see its effect upon previous events and those that follow it as well as the effect the event exerts upon a character or characters.

To identify and describe the narrator, a reader must determine the teller of the story. In a first person narrative, the story is told by a character in the story who uses the nominative pronouns I, me, and we. In a third person narrative, the narrator is a voice outside the story action that uses the nominative pronouns he, she, it, and they.

The speaker of a poem is the voice that "talks" to the reader. The speaker of a poem is not necessarily the poet.

To identify, explain, and analyze the actions of the characters that serve to advance the plot, a reader should know that characters cause the plot to happen. Usually a story plot is based on what characters say, do, or believe. Conflicts evolve from interactions between and among characters. In turn, plots develop around conflicts. What a character does affects the development of the plot as well as its resolution.

A critical reader of literary text can

- isolate characters, determining if they are major or minor characters, noting their actions, speech, and thoughts, and observing the attitudes of other characters toward them
- detail conflicts created by and among characters and determine the type of conflict that is created
- follow a plot, judging how that plot is driven by character elements or character conflict
- determine how character, conflict, and plot function together

To analyze an author's approach to issues of time in a narrative, a reader must first be able to follow the elements of a narrative--exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution--and to identify key events within each of those divisions of a narrative. Some events may be related as flashbacks during which the author relates an event out of sequence at an earlier time. A flashback provides a reader with information that will help him/her understand setting, characters, or conflict. A critical reader is aware of transitional words or text features that signal a flashback.

Foreshadowing is present through hints or clues in a text that suggest what may occur later in the sequence of the narrative's events. Foreshadowing occurs throughout a narrative and helps to create a tension as the reader anticipates what will happen. A critical reader understands that plots are not always chronological and that these two techniques are used to augment a reader's comprehension of and interest in a narrative.

To identify, explain, and analyze point of view and its effect on the meaning of a narrative, a reader must know that point of view is the perspective from which an author tells a story. There are two major points of view-first person and third person. In a first person narrative, the story is told by a character in the story. This narrator is a participant in the story action and tells the story using the pronouns I, me, and we. This type of narration is

limited because a reader knows only the narrator's perspective of other characters, the setting, and story events.

In a third person narrative, the story is told by someone who is not a character in the story. This type of story-teller may relate events much like a reporter relaying the news and use the nominative pronouns she, he, and they. More often, though, a third person narrator will relay the thoughts and attitudes of a single character, usually the main character. This is limited omniscient narration. At times a narrator will relay the thoughts and feelings of all characters. This is the omniscient or all-knowing narrator.

A critical reader knows that not all narrators are reliable and that they may present information limited by their own knowledge and observations. This, in turn, may limit a reader's knowledge. To construct meaning of a narrative, a critical reader must acknowledge the scope and the limitations of each type of narration and then using other narrative elements, draw conclusions about meaning.

To analyze the interactions among narrative elements and their contribution to meaning, a reader must have knowledge of all narrative elements and their dependence upon each other. A critical reader must determine the type of narrative being read, the type(s) of conflict in the narrative, the relationship between the setting and the mood of the narrative, the ways that character is developed, the relationship that exists among the characters, the setting, the story events, and the point of view from which a narrative is told. Each of these elements must be analyzed in isolation and then observed as a piece of a whole narrative. Finally, a critical reader makes judgments about the relative importance of each of these elements to a particular text, and then using each element and its contribution, constructs meaning of a whole text.

Public Release Item #1 Brief Constructed Response (BCR) Item with Annotated Student Responses

Question

Read the story 'Arachne' and 'Damon and Pythias' and answer the following question.

How is Athena's disguise important to the myth of Arachne?
Support your answer with details from the myth.

Write your answer on your answer document.

Annotated Student Responses

The disguise of Athena is important to the story because it means that Athena gave Arachne a chance and did not want to punish her. She tries to tell her to take her words backs by saying "Let me counsel you to withdraw your words." Arachne was too stubborn and was punished

Score for Sample Student Response #1: Rubric Score 3

Annotation, Using the Rubric: This response demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of the text. The student uses text-relevant information to explain how important Athena's disguise was to the myth: "Athena gave Arachne a chance and did not want to punish her." The student extends understanding by clarifying that although Athena gave Arachne the opportunity "to take her words back. . . . Arachne was too stubborn and was punished."

Athena's disguise is important to the myth of Arachne because without the disguis Athena would never truly know how Arachne felt. Because Athena disguised herself, Arachne told the truth about how he felt.
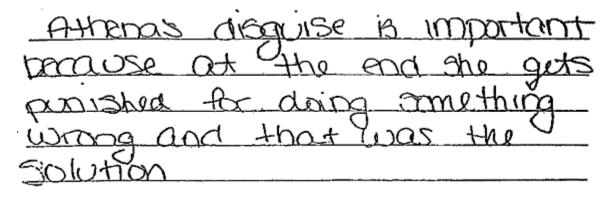
Score for Sample Student Response #2: Rubric Score 2

Annotation, Using the Rubric: This response demonstrates a general understanding of the text. The student uses text-relevant information to explain how Athena's disguise was important to the myth: ". . . without the disguis Athena would never truly know how Arachne felt. Because Athena disguised herself, Arachne told the truth about how she felt."

The disguise is important because it shows that Arachne was given warning to how powerful Athena was.

Score for Sample Student Response #3: Rubric Score 1

Annotation, Using the Rubric: This response demonstrates a minimal understanding of the text. The student uses minimal text-relevant information to explain how Athena's disguise was important: "Arachne was given warning to how poweful Athena was."

Athenas disguise is important because at the end she gets punished for doing something wrong and that was the solution

Score for Sample Student Response #4: Rubric Score 0

Annotation, Using the Rubric: This response is completely incorrect. The student incorrectly explains how the disguise is important to the myth.

Handouts

Many modern words have their roots in Greek Myths. The story of Arachne and her challenge to the goddess Athena reveals the basis for spiders being called arachnids.
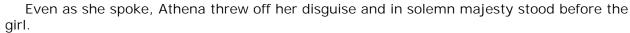
Arachne

by Max J. Herzberg

On another occasion Athena contested[1] for honors with a mortal. This mortal was Arachne. Her father was Idmon, skilled in the art of dyeing in purple, and from infancy the girl had been taught her father's art, joined with that of weaving. In all the land there was none that surpassed her. So conceited did she become that, lifting her head proudly to the skies, she challenged Athena herself, patron of the arts of the household, to compete with her.

Pallas Athena had watched the progress that Arachne was making, and when she heard the presumptuous challenge, she assumed the guise of an old woman and came to the spindle at which Arachne was weaving.

"I am," she said, "a woman old in experience, and I have seen much in this wide world. To me has come the knowledge of your challenge to Athena. Let me counsel you to withdraw your words. You surpass and shall surpass all other mortals, but how vain and foolish it is to contend with the immortal gods, from whom comes all skill!"

"Be silent, foolish old woman," replied Arachne scornfully. "I fear not Athena, but shall put her to shame with my skill. Let her appear and put me to the test."

Even as she spoke, Athena threw off her disguise and in solemn majesty stood before the girl.

"Athena is here," she said; and at her words Arachne trembled and realized too late how insane had been her challenge. But she summoned up her courage and began to weave her most skillful web. She wove the web in all colors, but mostly in the royal purple of which her father was the master. At last her work was complete.

Then Athena began to weave, and she depicted wondrous scenes in high Olympus, and from her very web floated forth divine fragrance of nectar and ambrosia. An unearthly beauty hovered over the design. In the corner Athena pictured the fate that had come to mortals who had defied the gods, and as she went from one to the other Arachne began to feel doom stealing closer and closer. As the last corner was completed, Athena turned to her, touched her with her magic spindle, and said:

"Punished shall you be for your presumption, but the gods will not let die such skill as you have shown. Change to an insect, that other mortals may take warning from you, but ever weave a web of marvelous design."

At the words of Athena, Arachne began to shrink and shrivel. Shortly she was completely transformed. Where a girl had stood an insect crawled—the spider; and before the eyes of the terrified beholders it scuttled off to a corner and immediately began weaving a web of shimmering threads. To this day the Greeks call the spider "arachne."

[1]Contested—competed
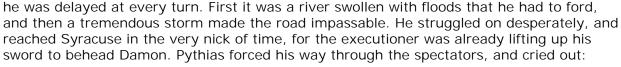
Damon and Pythias

By Max J. Herzberg

It is likely that these men actually existed. According to the story, they were subjects of the tyrant Dionysius, who ruled over Syracuse in Sicily during the fifth century. Both Damon and Pythias were renowned for their wisdom and goodness, but in some manner of which there is no record, Pythias incurred the anger of the tyrant and was condemned by him to death. He bore the sentence bravely, but he asked Dionysius to grant him one favor—permission to go home and settle his affairs. Damon offered to be a hostage for the safe return of his friend.

The tyrant agreed to let Pythias go.

"But you must be here by such and such an hour," he warned him, "or your friend will die for you."

Pythias set out for his home, which was a considerable distance away. He settled his affairs, divided his goods among his kinsfolk, and set out on his way back to Syracuse. Unfortunately, however, he was delayed at every turn. First it was a river swollen with floods that he had to ford, and then a tremendous storm made the road impassable. He struggled on desperately, and reached Syracuse in the very nick of time, for the executioner was already lifting up his sword to behead Damon. Pythias forced his way through the spectators, and cried out:

"Hold your sword! Here I am!" and knelt down to receive the blow. But Dionysius was so filled with astonishment and admiration at the loyalty of the friends that he pardoned Pythias, and even asked that he might be admitted to his and Damon's friendship.

Rubric - Brief Constructed Response (BCR)

Score 3
The response demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of the text.

- Addresses the demands of the question
- Effectively uses text-relevant[1] information to clarify or extend understanding

Score 2
The response demonstrates a general understanding of the text.

- Partially addresses the demands of the question
- Uses text-relevant[1] information to show understanding

Score 1
The response demonstrates a minimal understanding of the text.

- Minimally addresses the demands of the question
- Uses minimal information to show some understanding of the text in relation to the question

Score 0
The response is completely incorrect, irrelevant to the question, or missing.[2]

Notes:

[1] Text-relevant: This information may or may not be an exact copy (quote) of the text but is clearly related to the text and often shows an analysis and/or interpretation of important ideas. Students may incorporate information to show connections to relevant prior experience as appropriate.

[2] An exact copy (quote) or paraphrase of the question that provides no new relevant information will receive a score of "0".

Rubric Document Date: June 2003